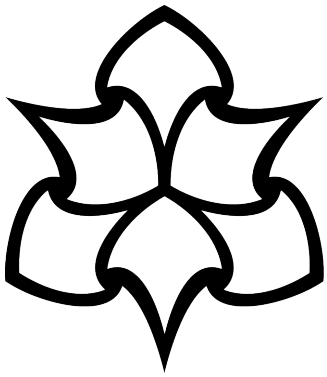

Chapter 4

Maria Montessori

Patricia Giardiello

> To those who are interested in the education and welfare of children, Maria Montessori stands out pre-eminently as a noble example of a New Woman, one whose genius and wonderfully sympathetic insight into the hearts and minds of children have awakened the interests of the whole world in her theory for the education of children (Yale Stevens 1913: 2)

Introduction

This chapter[i] sets out to establish the circumstances that led to Maria Montessori, becoming a renowned pedagogical expert and to elaborate on her diverse and distinct philosophy which has left a lasting legacy to early childhood education.

In the years following the opening of her first nursery school in 1907, the Casa Dei Bambini (Children's House) located in San Lorenzo, one of the very poorest areas in Rome at the time, Montessori began formulating her ideas concerning a pedagogic reconstruction of early childhood education, which eventually became known world-wide as the Montessori Method. The innovations in education that Montessori pioneered clearly demonstrated a woman ahead of her time and this was apparent in many other aspects of her life. In her early work Montessori began advocating for both women's and children's rights first coming to the world's attention in September 1896 when she was invited to serve as a delegate for Italy at the International Congress for Women's Rights in Berlin where the conference adopted her proposal for equal pay for equal work. Following this success and favourable media attention Montessori gave three further lectures at the 1889 International Council of Women in London (Babini 2000; Kean and Oram 1990). Montessori spoke passionately of the very poor conditions of the Italian women teachers and denounced the appalling working conditions of minors in Italy. Her deep rooted political convictions, reinforced by a strong sense of social justice not only conditioned her professional career but

eventually led to the improvement of the lives of young children and their families, in the deprived conditions of the newly industrialised cities.

Montessori's formative years

Montessori was born on the 31st August 1870 in the town of Chiaravalle, in the province of Ancona Italy at a time of great political turmoil. In a land for centuries divided up into separate states, Italy had finally become a unified country with Rome newly elected as its capital in 1871. Although now geographically united, the socially and economically deprived south and the wealthier industrialised north thwarted any sense of national unity at the time. The lack of stability created by ever changing coalition governments unable to deal with corruption in its midst eventually led in 1922 to a fascist dictatorship led by Benito Mussolini. Whilst still a young child her family left Chiaravalle for Rome where her father, a public official, took up a position in a newly established ministry. When Montessori was six years old and attending infant school, a left-wing government, under the leadership of Agostino Depretis, came to power, responsible for inaugurating social and educational reform (Chisnall 2008). This had a direct impact on Montessori's own educational journey as in 1883 she began secondary school in the first year that this possibility became available to Italian girls. Up to this time girls were not encouraged to receive more than a basic elementary school education. Excelling in mathematics and in order to fulfil her desire to become an engineer Montessori's next step was to enrol at the Reale Scuola Technica Michelangelo Buonarroti. However these were times when medicine, rather than other disciplines, provided a platform on which to speak out across a broad agenda including the physical, moral and social regeneration of the recently created Italian nation. Furthermore in Italy, as in most other European countries at the time, the medical degree provided an early point of access for women to enter universities (Babini 2000). Consequently in 1889, in a sudden change of plan, Montessori enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine of La Sapienza the University of Rome and although she was not, as is generally claimed, the first female medical graduate in Italy she was the only female during her time at La Sapienza to graduate with a degree in medicine. In 1896, after completing her medical degree, in which she chose to specialise in psychiatry, a choice based on her passion for scientific research and the social implications of psychological

research, Montessori began her work in the public medical clinics in Rome. Montessori saw feminism, politics and social medicine as inextricably intertwined and in the public eye she increasingly became the ‘face‘ of her causes (Babini 2000: 50).

Drawing on her experience whilst working in the psychiatric clinics, Montessori participated in the first two Italian conferences on pedagogy, held in Turin 1898 and Naples in 1901. Montessori regarded herself as somewhat of an intruder when attending the conference in Turin[ii] because as she affirmed ‘the subsequent felicitous union between medicine and pedagogy still remained a thing undreamed of in the thoughts of that period’ (Montessori 1912: 35). Her papers were very well received by the academic community and led to her involvement in the newly founded *Lega Nazionale per la Protezione dei Deficienti* (National League for Care and Education of Mentally Deficient Children) (Catarsi 1995). The League opened the first *Scuola Magistrale Ortofrenica'* for ‘mentally deficient‘ children (similar to what would be referred to today in the UK as a school for children with special educational needs) and invited Montessori to be the director. It was an unparalleled appointment for a woman in that very conservative time. In the following two years Montessori began a study of what became known at the time as remedial pedagogy. Wishing to expand her studies further into what she described as ‘normal pedagogy’ and the underpinning principles upon which it is based, she enrolled as a student of philosophy at the University of Rome (Montessori 1964: 33).

It was during this period that her studies led Montessori to the works of Jean Itard (1774 -1838) and his student, Eduard Seguin (1812 - 1880). Itard, a French physician, is well known in the twenty-first century for his work with the *Wild Boy of Aveyron*, a youth who had been found wandering naked in the forest, presumably abandoned as a very young child and thus spending many years living alone. Although Itard’s efforts to ‘civilise’ the wild boy had a limited outcome he adopted a methodical approach in designing a process involving the use of careful observation and educational experimentation which included the use of colours, shapes and pictorial representations of familiar objects. Through his work Itard discovered that children experience their stage of development by engaging in activities that were appropriate to the particular period and for which they were both physiologically and psychologically ready. This idea had enormous appeal to the scientifically trained

Montessori and later became the basis of her own method (Gutek 2004; Seldin 2000). Montessori was also drawn to the ideas of Seguin who gave great impetus to the emergent sciences of the child and child development stemming from an essentially Darwinian, biological and evolutionary episteme (Brehony 2009). Seguin, who also built on the ideas of Itard, developed further techniques to support children who had learning difficulties that would be later adopted by Montessori, such as training through the senses and using specifically designed didactic training materials. These will be discussed in greater detail later on in the chapter.

Montessori's secret child

It was whilst at the *Scuola Magistrale Ortofrenica* Montessori's son, Mario, was born. Montessori and the child's father, Giuseppe Ferruccio Montesano, a medical colleague at the above mentioned institute, never married , so the child was kept secret and nursed in the Roman countryside, and was legally recognised by his father but not by his mother (Kramer 1976). It was a time of great anguish for Montessori, as at that time having an illegitimate child would have ended any chance of a professional career and resulted in social isolation. Deprived of the experiences of caring for her own child she focused her attention increasingly in meeting the needs of other children (Kramer 1976). Mario eventually came to live with Montessori as an adolescent contributing significantly to the spread of the Montessori Method. Both of them together would eventually establish the Association Montessori Internationale parent body to oversee the activities of schools and societies all over the world and supervise the training of teachers (Burnett 1962).

New beginnings

In 1902 Montessori embarked on a new stage in her career eventually teaching anthropology at the pedagogical school for the training of teachers, which had been instituted at the Faculty of Education (Facoltà di Magistero) (Foschi 2008). Montessori's lectures drew much attention because of her highly motivated and energetic presentations. These were based on a variety of disciplines ranging from medicine to anthropology and psychology providing a multi-disciplinary breadth of knowledge that was unusual at the time (Gutek 2004). During that period Montessori produced her first major work, *Pedagogical Anthropology,* which was translated in to English in 1913. In this text Montessori explains that in contrast to general

anthropology which starts from a basis of data founded on observation alone, pedagogical anthropology starts from an analogous basis of observation and research. Furthermore, although sharing a theoretical kinship with Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel, Montessori believed that the existing pedagogy, handed down from these three philosophers was incomplete and vague as it failed to embrace the importance of studying each of the children before educating them. Montessori argued that merely deducing what it was like to be a child, had resulted in a philosophical rather than scientific view of the child (Montessori 1912).

Education for a New Society

Educational theory in Italy at the turn of the 19th Century was undergoing a fundamental review, mainly brought about by the protracted intellectual crisis that beset post-unification. New ideas, predominantly within the realms of positivism (see Chapter 20) were challenging Italian philosophers. Furthermore, the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation was greatly impacting on education. The drive for education for the masses demanded explanations such as those of personality, freedom, and individual autonomy. In the attempt to digest such complex issues emerging at the time, Montessori also entered the debate on education for a new society. For example, by referring to Marxist theory on the image of the labourer as a producer of wealth and well-being, accorded the means and conditions needed for his work as a matter of right, Montessori was able to draw a comparison with the child‘s place in society. In Montessori‘s view ‘the child too is a toiler and the aim of his work is to make a man … fashioning humanity itself and seen in this way society must heed the child, recognise his rights and provide for his needs‘ (Montessori, 1967:17). Montessori believed that if mankind was going to create a new order of society, with morality and social values rather than conquest, power and profit at its core (Duckworth 2006) then adults, including educators, ‘should have faith in the fresh vitality and uncluttered vision of the child as a messiah‘ (Montessori 1972: 14). The components of a learning environment that would free children to realise their innate human potential was the essential ingredient in Montessori‘s vision of education for a new society.

The Children’s House

By 1906, Montessori was gaining attention as an expert pedagogue and had become well known in the liberal and radical circles of the Roman elite (Foschi 2008). As a result Eduardo Talamo (1858–1916), civil engineer and general manager of the Roman Institute of Real Estate (IRBS), approached Montessori to direct the educational activities of the *Case dei Bambini,* of the IRBS (Foschi 2008) in the working class area of San Lorenzo, Rome. The establishment of the first Children's House, which was part of a large scale restructuring of the existing over crowded tenements with their terrible living conditions provided Montessori with an opportunity to create a 'real experimental laboratory' in which to observe children closely and develop what she referred to as a revolutionary new pedagogy (Babini 2000: 63). Revolutionary, as Montessori held the belief that her new pedagogy, would also be the source of a more radical transformation of society (Babini 2000). Sharing the same utopian ideals as Comenius (see Chapter 2) with regard to the purpose of education, Montessori viewed the education of young children as both a socialising and liberating force; with the establishment of Children's Houses women would be liberated and children would no longer prevent women from working and reaching their full potential. Montessori's vision was that the Children's Houses would form the core of a broader project of homes for the future where public state intervention would ensure that working mothers were supported in their new role by innovations. such as a communal kitchen, where the food was ordered in the morning ready to be delivered to homes in the evening, on site infirmaries, where the mothers could leave their sick children to be cared for by trained medical staff, and before and after school groups and reading rooms to add comfort and provide intellectual stimulation to the adults in the communities. Montessori's transposition of the mother into someone with a social function stemmed from her practical feminism, one that is grounded in the centrality of the Italian modern era. (Stewart-Steinberg 2007). At the time of the opening of the first Children's House in Via dei Marsi 58 in January 1907, the Italian feminist movement was at its height and pressure was mounting in the campaign for female suffrage (Stewart-Steinberg 2007). There occurred a shifting of boundaries between public and private spheres from which grew the practical rather than theoretical ability of women to create, but also to lobby for the implementation of services necessary to create social citizenship (Del Rossi 2013). It was during this period that Italy experienced a period of significant growth and modernisation and it

was the image of the' professional woman' that Montessori wished to promote (Babini 2000: 54).

Underpinning influences

Valuing a child-centred approach to the education of children, as espoused by Montessori can be traced back to the ideas of the early key thinkers and philosophers: Aristotle, Quintilian, Comenius, Rousseau, Locke, Pestalozzi and Froebel (see Chapters 1, 2, 3 and Giardiello 2013). Learning and development is fostered in Montessori's prepared environment through the child's sensory experience of the materials and didactic equipment; specifically, the child's sensory understanding of what the objects are made of, their design, their use and their aim. These four features are reminiscent of Aristotle's (384-322 BC) list of the four causes, which shape processes: matter (the material cause), pattern (the formal cause), agency (the efficient cause) and goal (the final cause) (Feez 2007). Quintilian (c. AD 35-100), drawing on his own experiences as a teacher, emphasised the value of observing children and recognising individual strengths, thus providing a strong connection to Montessori's principle of carefully carried out observations. Comenius also found favour with Montessori through his focus on learning through the senses, first hand experiences and learning by doing (Comenius 1628-1632/1967). The key ideas of Locke (1632-1704) and Rousseau 1712-178) were also influencing factors in the thinking behind Montessori's approach. Locke's view of the development of consciousness from concrete experience to abstraction is realised in Montessori's principle of the absorbent mind (Feez 2007). Locke's idea of a child's mind being that of a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) upon which experiences make their mark and the importance of the child' environment in influencing thought and experiences resonated strongly with what Montessori set out to achieve in her work with children. However Montessori went beyond Locke's *tabula rasa* theory as she believed that every child is born with some particularly strength that could be uncovered and developed individually given the right conditions for learning. Rousseau, in his fictional work Emile (1762/1979) presented profound ideas on education as a liberating force and a medium with which to reform society. He believed that education should take its cues from nature and allow time for children to develop and learn through self-discovery and natural unfolding of their abilities.

Montessori's thinking was also reminiscent of Rousseau in relation to her criticism of the adult world, which in her opinion gives no consideration to children (Röhrs 1994). The Agazzi sisters, Rosa (1866-1951) and Carolina (1870-1945), well known Italian Nursery teachers from Trieste, were also an inspiration with regard to the development of the whole child through their child-initiated, practical life experiences which Montessori re-shaped and adapted using a more methodical and scientific approach (Röhrs 1994). It is clear that Montessori gave attention to ideas of the early philosophers and educators in the formulation of her own method of education. Education is an arena where theory and practice, culture and politics inevitably merge together and where intellectual and scientific research and achievement combine with social and political action (Monasta 2000). In the design of her new education system Montessori formulated a multifaceted and dynamic blend of existing ideas, theories and pedagogy with new insights gained from her innovative empirical study of child development. Montessori went to explain that :

> If education is to be reformed, it must be based upon children. No longer is it enough to study great educators of the past: as Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel; the time for that is over. Further I protest against myself being hailed as the great educator of this century, because what I have done is merely study the child, to take and express what he has given me and that is called the Montessori Method.
>
> (Montessori 1948: 17).

The Montessori Method – Discovery and Development

As soon as Montessori had at her 'disposal' a class of young children it was her wish to create within the Case dei Bambini a 'field for scientific experimental pedagogy and child psychology'(Montessori 1912: 72). She began this task, as was her desire, with no preconceived ideas about how the children should be performing preferring instead to retain as the only essential point of reference 'carefully recorded observations of the children… without clinging to any dogma about the activity according to the age of the child' (Ibid: 73).

> …we must proceed by a method which shall tend to make possible to the child complete liberty. This we must do if we are to draw from the observation of his

> spontaneous manifestations conclusions which shall lead to the establishment of a truly scientific psychology. It may be that such a method holds for us many surprises, unexpected possibilities
>
> (Montessori 1912: 29/30).

Montessori believed that each child, although working collectively, should have the freedom of movement and independence to choose when and what to learn and not be directed by the teacher. It is clear therefore that Montessori had a deep respect for the distinct individuality of the child whose unique identity should be recognised through close observation. These observations of the children's spontaneous activity and how they learn in different ways were incorporated into the design of the didactic materials and the pedagogical method of working with the materials.

The overarching guiding principle of Montessori's revolutionary pedagogy is *freedom* and *structure.* Montessori's belief was that freedom and discipline were intertwined and each could not be achieved without the other. Viewed in this way, discipline was not something imposed from the outside but rather a challenge to become worthy of freedom (Röhrs 1994). Seeing education as a process in setting children free, Montessori demonstrated that within a carefully structured environment children could be free to teach themselves, first through the senses and then through the intellect (Duckworth 2006).

Montessori argued for the liberty of the child, not that of pure abandonment as advocated by Rousseau but a freedom that should permit a development of individual, spontaneous manifestations of the child‘s nature‘(Montessori 1965, p. 28). Furthermore embedded in this notion of liberty was Montessori‘s discovery, based on countless hours of observation, that children were not motivated by extrinsic rewards but rather their motivation and persistence at a task were driven by their desire to work at the task itself. For this reason Montessori placed great emphasis on a prepared environment, in which freedom was more akin to self-discipline and under the direction not of the teacher but rather a self-correcting pedagogy through the use of didactic material, a practice that Montessori describes as ‘auto education‘ and which is at the core of her scientific pedagogy (Montessori 1912: 370). As part of this

reasoning Montessori (1965: 14-15) objected vehemently to the use of measurements to design desks and benches which forced children to become ‘like butterflies mounted on pins … fastened each to his place‘. Consequently having criticised traditional school classrooms for their enslaving ‘stationary desks and chairs’, Montessori's classroom was a child-friendly environment which included small tables and chairs, light enough for a child to carry, low washstands, and low cupboards for the children to access materials (Montessori 1965: 16).

Although critically disposed towards Froebel‘s specifically designed materials which he referred to as *gifts* and *occupations* (Froebel 1826/1906: 205) (see Chapter 3), Montessori derived inspiration for her didactic equipment predominately from Itard and Seguin who believed in educating children through their senses. Montessori believed that ‘the education of the senses must be of the greatest pedagogical interest’ (Montessori 1912: 215) particularly during the period of rapid development from birth to seven years of age. Montessori’s sensorial materials helped the young children attending the Case dei Bambini to isolate and develop the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. These included sound boxes and bells to develop the auditory sense; food preparation and smelling bottles for the olfactory sense; colour, shape, size and form resources to develop visual sense. To promote the tactile sense rough and smooth boards and sandpaper shapes where provided. Montessori designed further activities so that young children could combine and integrate the tactile with vestibular (balance) and proprioceptive (body awareness) stimuli. Montessori’s pedagogic approach included *Practical Life Exercises* which worked for the vestibular and proprioceptive senses through children’s care of self, which included: washing, brushing hair and teeth, dressing, tying of shoe laces and of care of the immediate environment, for example, polishing brass objects, washing up and watering the plants, pouring water into bowls and also ‘grace and courtesy‘, for example; learning to move gracefully, to greet each other, to lift objects carefully and to receive various objects from each other politely (Montessori 1912). Montessori wrote ‘This sense training prepared the ordered foundation upon which he [the child] may build up a clear and strong mentality’ (Montessori 1912: 216). With her scientific training and constructivist leanings Montessori was to produce equipment that was methodically designed to exploit the progressive order in which she believed young children develop. Montessori wrote:

> The hands are the instruments of man's intelligence…He constructs his mind step by step till it becomes possessed by memory, the power to understand, the power to think‘
> (Montessori 1967: 27).

Adaptations of Montessori‘s great array of sensory and sensory-motor didactic materials can be found in most early childhood settings today. However the mere presence of the materials would not be enough for Montessori who believed that only under proper guidance would they be educationally effective. This rested on the principles of recognising children‘s growth at crucial developmental moments which Montessori, referred to as *Sensitive Periods*[iii]*.* Montessori proposed that if these periods are given proper consideration they can be exploited to promote episodes of intense and efficient learning, but if advantage is not taken of them, then those opportunities are irretrievably lost. This developmental sequence of children‘s mental growth attracted the attention of Jean Piaget who would eventual move beyond Montessori‘s concepts to formulate his own developmental psychology (Kramer 1976).

The teacher as facilitator

> To stimulate life, leaving it free to develop, to unfold , herein lies the first task of the educator.
> (Montessori 1912: 115)

For Montessori, the child was a promise and a starting-point for the education of the ‘new man‘. Montessori was keen to demonstrate in her writings the dangers of authoritarian teaching methods:

> The child is like a soul in a dark dungeon striving to come in to the light, to be born, to grow…And all the while, there is standing by a gigantic being of enormous power waiting to pounce on it and crush it
> (Montessori 1965: 34)

Montessori’s conception of the role of the teacher differed from that found in a traditional school, where the teachers were the focal point of the child’s attention.

Montessori preferred the term; *direttrice,* a directress who had three roles in respect of the pupils; to prepare the environment with meticulous attention to detail with careful use of space and separate work areas; to act as a guide and demonstrate procedures and show the correct use of the didactic materials (after this introduction self-correcting learning would take place); to remain in the background directing the flow of routine classroom living, observing and keeping records of the children's activities but never intervening or interfering. Montessori set high standards for her teachers whom she saw as being part of the environment:

> When the teacher shall have touched, in this way soul for soul each one of her pupils, awakening and inspiring the life within them as if she were an invisible spirit, she will then possess each soul, and a single word from her shall suffice.
> (Montessori 1912: 116).

The idea that children could learn for themselves, referred to today as child-initiated learning, was quite startling at the time for those teachers who considered it their 'bounden duty' to plan for whole group learning (Burnett 1962: 73). In contrast to Froebel, who suggested that his teachers should live and play with the children leading and directing them, Montessori believed that her teachers should remain in the background, watching and facilitating but leaving the initiative entirely to the children. In this respect Montessori's sense of democratic values and social justice influenced her thinking as she believed that through the development of self-discipline children would be able to act ethically and handle conflict with maturity (see Chapter 12). In terms of the valorisation of play although not viewed as a creative force in itself, Montessori did acknowledge it as a tool through which young children might learn about how to become human. Her view of play was in terms of allowing children to express their inner needs, desires and conflicts but it was not the dominant form of activity (Montessori 1948).

Lasting legacy

In April 1912, Montessori published the first of many editions of *The Montessori Method,* soon translated into all of the major world languages, in which she describes in great detail her insights regarding the education of these young children in her schools. Reading about the progress of these socially disadvantaged children

brought visitors from many parts of the world and in the United States interest in the Montessori Method reached a peak just before World War One (Burnett 1962). In December 1913, Montessori visited the United States with a determined ambition to communicate to the world a new pedagogy that had the ideals of autonomy, independence, freedom and peace in common with the feminist movement. Interestingly, these ideals were better received in the United States than in Italy where the progressive education of Parker and Dewey (see Chapter 6) was attracting interest (Chistolini 2009).

The spread of her ideas was further aided by a series of stimulating lectures held in all parts of the world. In 1929 Montessori established the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) to give structure to her work and to ensure that her standards for teacher training would be continued long after her death in accordance with her pedagogical and scientific principles. The AMI headquarters are in Amsterdam and, in affiliation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), overview the activities of the teacher training courses in the Montessori Method in all corners of the world. Nevertheless, there is diversity in Montessori educational communities around the world with their differing interpretations and practices responding to the local needs of children and their families. However the essential elements of Montessori's philosophy with regard to the role of the adult and the learning environment can be found in all early childhood education approaches where the practitioners are skilled in 'following' the child; fostering independence through a carefully prepared environment; responding to the changing interests, needs and democratic rights of the child. For example, ideas about the democratic rights of the child and the importance of a prepared environment are fundamental to what the protagonists of the internationally renowned Reggio Emilia Approach feel are at the centre of their educational vision. Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach in Northern Italy (see Chapter 31) said that they meditated on the work of Montessori describing her reverentially as 'Montessori – she is our mother, but as all children, we have had to make ourselves independent of our mothers' (as cited in Rinaldi 2006:7). So, Montessori's objectives of education for peace were reworked by the Reggio Emila community and are at the centre of their educational vision.

In collaboration with the New Education Fellowship (NEF). Montessori proposed *a Social Party of the Child* to assure the welfare of childhood and the recognition of children's rights. Although World War II intervened in her work, Montessori was able to continue with this theme when she participated in the founding meetings of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1950 (Barres 2007). One task was to create the International Institute of Education to promote international peace through education (Barres 2007). During the discussions linked to educating the '*new man'* Montessori reminded members of UNESCO that this is what she and many others had been doing for the past decades. It would take another fifty years before early childhood education became a priority item on the world's agenda (Barres 2007). By focusing on developing their independence, Montessori (1965/1917) emphasised the empowering of children as autonomous learners, acknowledging their right to be seen as powerful individuals now rather than adults in waiting. Montessori also had a clear vision of what children's rights should be (Duckworth 2006).

Although there is no longer a specific reference to the rights of the child in the current EYFS framework (DfE 2014), the sense of *freedom* that Montessori created in her *Case Dei Bambini* is evident in those settings where children are able to express their opinions and follow their own interests or preoccupations without fear or favour. This is reflected in the Early Years Outcomes (DfE 2013:16) for children aged 40- 60 months 'confident to speak to others about own needs, wants, interests and opinions'. However, Montessori did not view each child's development in terms of outcomes but rather as a unified whole. She placed great value on the processes of learning and the skill of the teacher in enabling this. Montessori was keen to stress that the relationship between the teacher and the child, describing the teacher's role and techniques as analogous to those of the valet. However not in the sense of addressing the child's physical needs, as the child is encouraged to acquire physical independence through the Practical Life Exercises but rather to attend to the child's inner spiritual needs. This approach to teaching was new at the time but Montessori believed that the first six years are especially crucial to the holistic and spiritual development of the child. During this time, the young child literally 'incarnates the

world around him and the things he sees are not just remembered; they form part of his soul" (Montessori 1972: 63).

Many of Montessori's approaches can be seen in the guiding principles that underpin the current EYFS (DfE 2014: 6).

These are:

- every child is a **unique** child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured;
- children learn to be strong and independent through **positive relationships**;
- children learn and develop well in **enabling environments**, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers; and
- children develop and learn in different ways and at **different rates.**

Montessori's philosophy of teaching, which has provided a lasting legacy to early childhood education, is best précised in her own words:

> The basis of our teaching is that…the child has to acquire physical independence by being self-sufficient; he must become of independent will by using in freedom his own power of choice; he must become capable of independent thought by working alone without interruption… We have to help the child to act, will and think for himself. This is the art of serving the spirit , an art which can be practiced to perfection only when working among children.
> (Montessori 1967: 281).

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i

Excerpts of this chapter have previously been published in GIardiello 2013.

ii

For political reasons the conference in Naples never took place , buts its proceedings were published nevertheless (Foschi , 2008)

iii

The term was first coined by the Dutch Geneticist, Hugo De Vries and is compared with the notion of 'budding points' used by botanists (source: DeBaldo,2005).